



**Senate Republicans**

**The Senate  
of the  
State of Hawaii**

**"COMMON SENSE, COMMON GROUND"  
OPENING DAY SPEECH 2005  
JANUARY 19, 2005  
BY SENATOR FRED HEMMINGS  
SENATE MINORITY LEADER  
(DISTRICT 25—KAILUA-WAIMANALO-HAWAII KAI)**

**MEDIA:  
PLEASE NOTE THIS SPEECH IS  
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**Senator Fred Hemmings**

**Common Sense, Common Ground**

We, the people of Hawaii, have reasons to be optimistic. Record numbers of workers are employed. Business is growing and as a result, tax revenues are up. In these times of economic prosperity, besides counting our blessings, we must lay the foundation for enduring prosperity. The Old Testament tells us of a very wise Joseph, son of Jacob, counseling the Pharaoh of Egypt during seven years of plenty to prepare for the inevitable years of famine. So it must be. Wise leaders see beyond today. Let's be wise. If we are to meet the challenges of continuing prosperity, we need to capitalize on everyone's talents. Republicans choose to be proponents rather than opponents. On many significant issues, we all stand on common ground. Today and throughout this session, let's work to capitalize on that which we hold in common.

**Budget**

Last session, the executive branch of government, under the leadership of Governor Lingle emphasized conservation and fiscal responsibility. Yes, for too many years we balanced the budget by juggling the books and raiding funds designated for specific uses. For the first time in a decade, we can implement a state budget that lives within our means. The Governor has proposed a budget that does just that. Let's work together to make it happen. It should be noted that the Council on Revenues has projected a huge increase of state revenues from the original estimate. Having heard that, many special interest groups are clamoring to spend the money. It has already been spent. In

the six-year budget plan, the Office of Budget and Finance told us last year that we face well over \$200 million in new obligations, including a \$160 million in increased debt costs, \$70 million more to increase public employee fringe benefits and the list goes on. The point is any increase in tax revenues has already been spent. This year let's not lose sight of the goal of having government live within its means. It is prudent for each of us as legislators to recognize that we cannot fund everything. We must have the wisdom and integrity to set priorities.

### **Education**

Education reform is not a moot issue. Last year this legislature "reinvented education." Although we may not agree with some of the methodology, we can agree on the goal and recognize that public education needed to be reformed. Last year's reinventing education was the start, not the end, of reforming our public education system. After years of hearing that increasing spending was going to solve our education problems, it is important to recognize that simply increasing the budget will not necessarily yield improvement. Down through the years we have significantly increased education funding while enrollment has remained stagnant. The education budget of nearly \$2 billion is proof that Hawaii's taxpayers are most generous when it comes to funding education. Management, not money is the key to improvement. The collapse of a ceiling at Kailua Elementary is grim evidence of years of neglect of repair and maintenance of our schools. Keeping our children safe, especially in schools must be a priority. Once again the "system" of fixing schools is time consuming and expensive. Let's make sure that capital improvement money ends up fixing schools, not sustaining bureaucracy.

Regardless of political labels, we can focus on solutions that work. That is why Senate Republicans will be asking this legislature to authorize the creation of more Charter Schools. A recent audit and on going challenges should not deter us. The evidence is overwhelming that, despite inconsistent funding and other trials and tribulations, Charter Schools have succeeded in 1) improving student achievement; 2) providing for flexibility to meet differing demands; and so importantly 3) involving parents. These schools represent the ultimate decentralization, the ultimate empowerment of principals, teachers and parents. Our quest is simple---increase the number of charter schools and streamline the system for establishing them.

### **Traffic**

Traffic congestion steals our time, and tests our patience. For too long, many have been led to believe that a multi-billion dollar fixed railway on Oahu is the only solution. I will guarantee you that solution will do absolutely nothing for the neighbor islands and more than likely would be an economic abyss. There are immediate solutions that can ultimately have a very positive impact on gridlock. These solutions would cost relatively little and could be implemented quickly. For instance, after years of debate, Rod Haraga and Department of Transportation opened the Nimitz Hwy contraflow lane. Even prior critics are now lauding the change. The same was done on a trial basis at the Lunalilo-H1 onramp. The Department of Transportation cordoned off the Lunalilo on ramp at rush hour. This eliminated the crossover traffic getting off the H1 onto Vineyard. Ask anyone from East Honolulu and they will confirm the positive effect of this change. Castle Junction on the Windward side is much more expeditious with the improvement there. Experience has shown that, with bold leadership, immediate improvements can be

made in all our districts. Traffic statewide, but especially on Oahu, can be expedited with common sense and small, but significant, changes. Let's eliminate government gridlock to make it happen.

### **Affordable Housing**

We have common ground on another important issue. Last year this legislature passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 135 that called upon the governor to convene an affordable housing task force. We have the report and subsequently the Senate has instituted a bipartisan committee to further investigate the issue. Once again, we agree on the goal of making affordable housing a reality. More importantly we can agree on some of the solutions reiterated by both the Senate and the Governor's task forces. This Legislature should eliminate the long and tedious permitting process for housing projects. The State Land Use Commission has been clearly identified as a costly regulatory barrier. Let's eliminate the State Land Use Commission and allow counties the complete control over all land use. We can agree that public/private partnerships can work. Certainly the state has the land and those in the building and trades workforce have the talent to build low-cost homes for those who qualify. Let's provide the incentive to create public/private partnerships necessary to get the job done. Senate Republicans recognize that there are a myriad of reasons for homelessness. Economic hardship, substance abuse and even mental health issues are all pieces of the problem. To help us reach the laudable goal of housing for everyone, solutions must be equally diverse.

### **Constitutional Convention**

Senate Republicans will introduce legislation to facilitate a Constitutional Convention in 2008. We recognize that judicial activism has preempted legislative

intent. Laws should come from the Legislature elected by the people. We have seen increasing “ballot initiatives” that are needed to override judicial activism. Some would say that a few of the codicils in our Constitution need to be eliminated altogether. It is time for a Constitutional Convention.

All of us in this chamber believe that Hawaii is a special place. We can find ways to work together to make sure Hawaii doesn't lose its magic quality we call “aloha”. Senate Republicans represent the dreams, hopes and aspirations of many people in Hawaii. Once again, Senate Republicans will not abandon the principles that bind us together. Our belief is that the people should reign supreme over government. We will respect the right of victims and society to supercede the alleged rights of criminals. We reaffirm that the chief regulator and beneficiary of Hawaii's healthy economy should be the consumers, OUR constituents. I close by emphasizing that there is much more that binds us together than tears us asunder. I know that the diversity of Hawaii's people, Hawaii's gifts of nature, and the undeniable spirit of individual freedom is our strength.